

CLAIMANTS UNITE



CLAIMANTS NEWSPAPER NUMBER 12

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF CLAIMANTS UNIONS

FOOD OR FUEL PICKET

David Donnison, head of the SBC, was forced to meet CU members when angry claimants from all over London picketed the SBC HQ recently. During the heated discussion which took place he admitted that "BENEFITS ARE FAR TOO LOW" but he could do nothing about it for, as he went on to say, "THERE IS NO WAY WE CAN PERSUADE THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT TO GIVE ACCROSS THE BOARD INCREASES".

The picket had been called by West London CU to expose the SS policy on heating. Their strong feelings were summed up by one placard which read: "LAST YEAR HYPOTHERMIA : THIS YEAR MALNUTRITION".

But this Donnison denied. When faced with accusations from all sides that the SS was deducting massive sums from our weekly benefit leaving us only with the choice of FREEZE or STARVE he could only say that he had not heard of such cases and that he was satisfied that nationally the new arrangements had not led to a reduction in the number of lump sum grants made for fuel bills.

WE KNOW THIS TO BE FALSE! Every CU in the country has been finding that grants are just not being made. The only way to stop disconnections is by signing away large parts of our weekly benefit in what the SS euphamistically call "VOLUNTARY savings". Even at Appeals the Tribunal members have been known to say that "We don't make payments for fuel bills anymore".



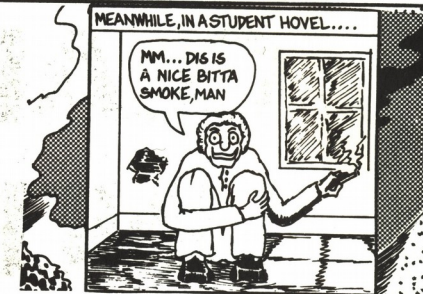
MORNING STAR

Not only does this policy save the DHSS a lot of money, it allows them to say they have taken steps to avoid the repeat of last winter's disaster with thousands of pensioners dying of cold. In reality they are simply sweeping the problem under the carpet.

Compulsory savings are not the answer; if claimants were able to save they would do it themselves. CLAIMANTS DEMAND A LIVING INCOME!



STUDENTS AND SOCIAL SECURITY



CARRY ON CLAIMING

As most of us are aware about nine months ago the D.W.S.S. and the DES suddenly announced that "Students will not be allowed to claim over the Christmas vacation". In an attempt to cut the amount of S.S. benefits paid out, and to try to make the unemployment figures look better these two departments have shuffled around notional elements in our grant to stop us claiming.

Last year the vacation element in the grant was £3.18 a week, this Christmas it is £11.35. This is exactly the same as an unemployed single person living with her or his parents would be entitled to claim.

But what if you haven't got the money? If you've spent it or if you never received it, hard luck!! Married students and single students paying rent will still be able to claim but they, as well, will get £11.35 deducted.

LOOPHOLES

What do we do about it? CARRY ON CLAIMING!! For all of us it means we are going to have to fight for any money. The Supplementary Benefit scheme is full of loopholes which are supposedly to help us get extra money in exceptional circumstances. However, these are used to cut our money. For example, following a recent court case the S.S. can cut claimant's money if they are sharing accommodation. This rule is used specifically against students and squatters. They even have special forms for students, with the ominous instruction in their secret 'A' codes: "forms All (student) must not be released to a claimant..." and going on "...treat each occupant as a joint tenant regardless of the stated financial arrangements."

For all these petty rules (and there are many more) it is possible to use the system to increase weekly benefits. But these have to be fought for. The first thing to do is demand that they give you a £2 earnings disregard. Although they legally don't have to, on many occasions appeal tribunals will award the £2 on hardship grounds. Or you could try to claim as a lodger at your parents. In most cases the S.S. will pay £18 a week and £4.10 pocket money. Get your parents to say that unless you pay board and lodging they will kick you out! Or if you are paying rent, or are married, and your parents are not making up your full grant (as happens in app. 70% of cases) then demand an emergency payment every week under section 13 of the S.S. Act.

It is all very well for us to write this but what happens in practice? Just like any Government body the S.S. is full of contradictions. The S.S. is just another organ of state control and any of the options mentioned and all the others will need fighting for. There are two alternatives. One is to appeal against every adverse decision the S.S. make. But this takes time and you probably won't get to the appeals tribunal before the Easter vacation!

So that leaves the other alternative, collective action! For eight years the Claimants Union has been fighting the S.S. on a basis of collective action. During the miners' strikes, the building workers strike etc. of the last Tory Government the Claimants Union took the lead in organizing strikers to get benefits from the S.S. Now in Bristol the N.U.S. and Bristol Claimants Union are working together over vacation claiming. We have come to realise from our everyday experience that the only way to survive on the S.S. is through militant collective action. Get together with other students and go down to the S.S. together. Back each other up and don't take no for answer. EVER. Keep pushing and one by one the cracks in the S.S. will begin to show.

Dear Claimants Union,

Re: STUDENTS VACATION BENEFITS.

Recent reports have explained how, for the purpose of DHSS calculations, the notional vacation element theoretically included in all student grants will now be conceptually concentrated in the Christmas and Easter vacation periods. Thus students are to be judged to have a vacation income during these periods which makes them ineligible for supplementary benefits if they register for work.

In these circumstances the reported new bill to deny students the right to benefit at Christmas and Easter hardly seems necessary. The Supplementary Benefits Commission is well used to applying such conceptualistic techniques to squeeze benefits without attracting the political odium of parliamentary action.

Students should remember however that their fictitious vacation income is based on an imagined "non householder" supplementary benefits level. Students who are "householders" or who have some other necessary experience could still qualify for benefits and should apply.

It should also be remembered that this latest piece of DHSS economic fantasy does not apply to those many students on "non advanced" courses (A level and below). These students will continue to qualify for benefits during all holidays if they register for work.

Faternally, Jack.
South Shields
C.U.



NEW YORK FUEL SHOCK

BY JACQUELINE SALJT, CHAIRPERSON, LEGAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE, NEW YORK CITY UNEMPLOYED AND WELFARE COUNCIL.

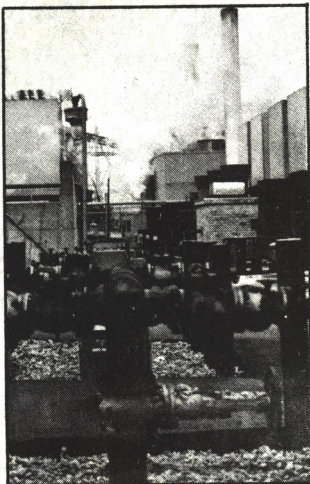
One of the more bitter ironies of our time lies in the extraordinary development of advanced technology in the midst of its lessening availability to the masses of poor people the world over; or more simply put, if Con Edison turns off the electricity you can't run a damned thing in the house, no matter how advanced it might be.

This bitter irony is no abstract existentialism—it is the stark reality for millions who live in poverty, juggling the bills from the landlord, the phone company (if they can afford a phone), the bank, and Con Edison, to name just a few. Poor people constantly find themselves at the mercy of these insatiable bill collectors, the kind of mercy that leaves them evicted, repossessed or living in the dark.

Fighting Back

A Con Ed turnoff is a common experience for welfare recipients and other poor people, who alone are no match for this monopoly's outrageous rates, computerized billing techniques and threats to discontinue service—threats which they carry out on a regular basis.

Two members of the New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council were recently involved in what were surely losing battles against the formidable Con Ed. One member's service had already been terminated. She had been without lights for over two months. She and her three children have asthma, and the fumes from the candles they were forced to burn were exacerbating their respiratory problems. They had no refrigerator and had been eating sandwiches and canned food since the electricity had been turned off. They kept milk in neighbors' refrigerators. School was starting, and the children would have had to do their homework by candlelight if the turnoff remained in effect. Con Edison had attached a debt of over \$600 to her bill—claiming that she was responsible for a bill her ex-husband had run up at another address. Unable to locate the husband, Con Ed discontinued her



service for non-payment of his bill.

The other case involved a union member who several years back had moved into an apartment where there was no stove and a non-functional boiler. The landlord, who serves as an active cop on the New York City police force, bought a hot plate and some electric heaters, instructing her to use them freely and promising that he would assume responsibility for the electric bill. However, this agreement was never stipulated in writing, and he went and had the account placed in her name and never paid the bill. She was subsequently burned out of the apartment in a fire that destroyed everything and eventually relocated to a new apartment, only to find Con Ed hot on her trail for a fast \$510 they claimed she owed. She was threatened with a turnoff in two weeks. There are 13 people living in her overcrowded apartment including some small children, an 87 year old woman who is her sister-in-law, and her husband, a man with a severe cardiac condition. As well, her daughter, blind and brain damaged from an accident, lives there on weekends.

Neither one had the money to pay these outlandish bills, and Con Edison was unrelenting in their position that they were responsible for payment.

Face to Face

On their behalf, the New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council demanded a negotiating session with Con Edison. A meeting was set up at their Queens central headquarters. We attended with the two members involved and two union representatives. Con Edison had two credit managers and a computer on their side.

The session lasted about two hours, ranging from careful perusal of the computer printouts, to heated discussion, to angry outbursts. Throughout, we made clear that their (Con Ed's) position was unacceptable. The concessions that we won at that meeting were significant; that the terminated service be restored immediately, with a 60 day period granted in which to investigate the legal responsibility, and prevention of a turnoff in the other case, with a 30 day period in which to contact the delinquent landlord.

Obviously these concessions were not decisive victories—in fact, even as negotiations continue, Con Ed will have the upper hand. But we will use this and other battles to strengthen our union and to develop our capacity to negotiate, to fight and to win. Certainly working people throughout this country have a long way to go before we can claim any decisive victories. But our intent is clear—and that intent is manifest in the organizations we are building; organizations like the New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council, which is fighting to collectively bargain on behalf of the poorest strata of the population, to defend their rights and living standards and to win a decent and productive life. □

We are happy to reprint an article from "The Struggle" on the fight by welfare claimants in New York, USA against electricity disconnections. "The Struggle" is a socialist newspaper in their last edition they published extracts from the Claimants Union Guidebook.

RUSSIA

its Social Security System



by Sch... you know who

This should have been an article about Social Security in the Soviet Union if our special correspondent had ever got it together enough to ask the right people the right questions. They got in with the questions first, so this is just a thumbnail sketch of Soviet reality which I have put together as the result of impressions I gained from staying there ten months in the two largest cities, Moscow and Leningrad.

There is no social security system as we understand it in the Soviet Union! It isn't just double think to say that they don't need one, but it is arguable that many of the provisions which the British 'Welfare State' make to stop people sliding into poverty are different in calibre from those that Soviet 'politicians' think unnecessary to cover their, the State's, needs.

There is no state provision to cover 'voluntary' unemployment as we understand it. Redundancy payments do exist for those sections or those sectors which are being contracted for various reasons, and also for individual

cases of redundancy (which is their euphemistic term for a general clearout on individual enterprise at office level or to get rid of an 'undesirable' employee). If someone chooses to or is forced out of a job it's down to them to make provision for themselves until they can find other work. However brutal this latter sounds in principle, in practice this state of affairs is made easier by three different sets of circumstances which the State may not have planned for but at least eases the experience of living from one job to the next.

(1) The continuing role that family ties still play in Russia: this means in effect that the number of people who can be relied on to tide the family over is numerically pretty large.

(2) Given regional and sectoral variations the Soviet Union isn't a country with an unemployment problem as such. I don't want to go into the whole bit about job satisfaction or gainful employment, but it is just bloody difficult because of various pressures. People just don't stay out of work for long periods of time.

(3) 'Political' and 'free speech' protests apart, it is bloody hard to lose a job in the Soviet Union. As far as I could see, discipline was tough in places, but within the 'firm' there were means of pressurising the worker to come back into the collective, and there would be a feeling of failure in actually having to sack someone.

Family Benefits: do exist but I could find out neither the scale rates nor whether there was an element of contributory (ie stamp) payments. I do know that the rewards for large families still exist and there may still well be stiffer taxes for the single and childless.

The Health Service is pretty comprehensive but patchy being so they say far better in town than in country. This is not a peculiarity of socialist countries, not that this is meant as a justification, but authorities generally have tended to concentrate health, and incidentally education and leisure facilities, in areas of highest density population. Prescriptions aren't free and they are based on differences in 'cost' prices of items: Soviet medicines are ridiculously cheap foreign medicines depressingly expensive.

Consultation facilities are free for all and these are handled through a system of Poly-Clinics which cater for various ailments but do not give full cover for all of them. The G.P. system doesn't exist. There is the disturbing existence of private practice which

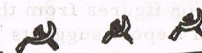
has existed in lesser or greater form after the first days of the Revolution gave way to the more 'pragmatic' reassessment which took place in the early 1920s. Although this means that the 'meritocracy' can buy better treatment this may well in practice be no better than that which is available to workers in a go-ahead firm which can also provide extra clinical facilities for its employees.

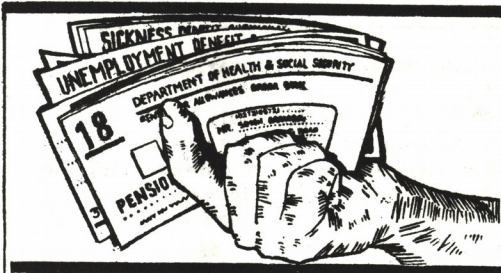
Single Parents and Unsupported Mothers: I could get no information at all, but I have a firm suspicion that they are obliged to remain within the family unit. i.e. that no special housing facilities are made available. A mitigating factor may be that the attitude towards illegitimacy within the society is far more superficially tolerant than in capitalist countries. Local authorities do have discretionary rights to make hardship payments but these may well depend on local prejudice/pressure and the amount of money locally available. As far as single parents staying in the family unit is concerned part of this is caused by a sheer shortage of housing units lost in the War and the enormous postwar drift into urban areas. Housing space is ostensibly decided on family size. This again can be got around by the welloff and also by employees in more go ahead firms.

This constant reference to goahead firms or enterprises is made because each enterprise keeps a proportion of its profits which at the discretion of the director with or without too much grass root consultation can make provision for new housing starts and medical facilities, access to sanatoria and rest homes etc. This may provide a strong incentive for individual workers in choosing one place of employment rather than another, given that the rate for the job is supposedly fixed by law rather than negotiable.

A few words in closing about keeping alive on a low income

Food is patchy in price and availability but communal feeding outlets are very cheap indeed and available for those with a stomach for it. Public Transport is very cheap and you aren't penalised for travelling distances. Rents are reputedly the lowest in the world per square foot. Utilities such as gas, electricity and telephones are literally pennies per week. In a country that is so cold this cheapness may be necessary but as far as I know neither the Canadians, Swedes or Swiss have this type of benefit from State generosity in this essential item of the household budget.





SMOKING CAN DAMAGE YOUR WEALTH

Steve is nineteen and unemployed. This week he got £7.65 from the SS. You don't live on £7.65 - you survive. Barely kept in food he can't afford any heating or clothing. He can't afford to visit relatives or friends. He has had to give up smoking. Which is ironic as one cigarette is the cause of Steve's present poverty.

A few weeks ago Steve started work in a local factory. Two weeks later he was sacked for smoking on the job. True it was a fire risk and there were notices hanging from the ceiling but these were faded and dirty and everyone smoked anyway, including the foreman who sacked him. So why did he lose his job? Could it be because a subsidiary plant had just closed and there was an excess of labour? Had Steve become just another example of backdoor redundancy?

But of course the story doesn't end here. When Steve got to the labour exchange he explained what had happened. Immediately the bureaucratic wheels began to turn and he became just another victim of the Industrial Misconduct Rule. Six weeks suspension from unemployment benefit - no insurance credits either - and when Steve took his B1 to the SS they cut his money by 40%. So Steve has been deliberately pushed below the subsistence level by the joint action of two government departments. Being fined £30 by the State for smoking a cigarette at work.

No one knows how many people are affected by the Industrial Misconduct Rule but an estimate based on figures from the SBC Annual Report suggests that at

least 35% of the unemployed may be punished by this rule. And all this because "a person should not become a charge on the national insurance fund" by his or her own actions. And, of course, the SS have to follow suit "to ensure that a man who through his own fault, loses unemployment benefit does not have the loss automatically made good by supplementary benefit."

As can be expected this ruling is used to discipline the new unemployed to give them a taste of the power of the system right from the start. Very little information is ever displayed about why the rule has been used and apart from the standard "you have the right to appeal" most claimants never have the rule explained to them. Most don't realise that they have to lodge appeals at both the SS and the dole and that both will be treated in totally different ways.

Claimants Unions in London have decided that action must be taken over this and as a first stage have decided to get together a pamphlet showing how the Rule works in the interests of employers as a disciplining measure, in the interests of the state to discipline the unemployed. They also aim to set out how to fight the Rule in individual cases. We are asking for any contributions - successful appeals, victimisation cases etc etc to be sent to East London CU.



INFORMATION

SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT RATES

HOUSEHOLDERS	SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
Couple	£20.65	£24.85
Single	£12.70	£15.70
NON HOUSEHOLDERS		
over 18 years	£10.15	£12.60
16 to 17 years	£ 7.80	
CHILDREN		
13 to 15	£ 6.50	
11 to 12	£ 5.35	
5 to 10	£ 4.35	
under 5	£ 3.60	

plus a RENT ADDITION

- 1) rent and rates in full.
- 2) mortgage interest plus an amount for insurance and repairs etc.
- 3) £1.20 rent allowance if a non householder.

or BOARD AND LODGINGS up to £18 a week and pocket money of £4.10.

GET A NEW WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF HOW YOUR BENEFIT IS BEING WORKED OUT NOW! (Form A124).

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLAIMANTS UNION MOVEMENT CONTACT THE FOLLOWING CLAIMANTS UNIONS WHICH ACT AS CO ORDINATING BODIES FOR THEIR REGIONS. If you write please remember to enclose a stamped addressed envelope. The publications library keeps an up to date address list, and people can subscribe to CU publications by writing to this address.

SOUTH THAMES
Camberwell CU,
Union Place,
122 Vassall Road,
London SW9.
(735 6123)

CYMRU /WALES
Swansea CU,
79 Brokesby Road,
Bon y maen,
Swansea,
West Glamorgan.

SOUTH WEST
Bristol CU
46 Richmond Road,
Montpelier,
Bristol 6.
(0272 422310)

SCOTLAND
Glasgow CU
St Brides Centre,
19/25 Rosevale St.
Glasgow G11.

WEST THAMES
West London CU,
510 Harrow Rd.,
London W10.
(01 969 7437).

MIDLANDS
Selly Oak CU,
768 Bristol Road,
Birmingham 29.
(021 472 3676).

NORTH
South Shields CU,
Peoples Place,
Derby Terrace,
South Shields.
(08943 65062).

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CLAIMANTS PUBLICATIONS: Claimants Guidebook, Women and Social Security, Strikers Hand Book, Unemployed Handbook, Anti Fisher Report, Heating Leaflets, Posters, Stickers, Membership Cards, Claim Forms, Appeal Forms, etc, back copies of the Newspaper. All available from 44 Havelock Road, Handsworth, Birmingham 20 or nearest coordinating union. Send stamped addressed envelope for price list.

**NEVER MEET THE SS
ALONE!**

**THEY NEVER MEET
YOU ALONE!**



CLAIMANTS UNITE NEEDS YOUR HELP !!! We are desperately short of money to maintain the newspaper at its present low price to claimants. If you are working or have some cash to spare, rush it to: CAMBERWELL CLAIMANTS UNION, Union Place, 122 Vassall Rd., SW9.

MINI
PLENTY

BUROKRATS
RULE
OK

AS ROSY FINGERED DAWN
STEALS OVER BETHNAL
GREEN,
THE FIRST CLAIMANT
AT THE MINISTRY
OF PLENTY CAN BE
SEEN.

BY HALF ELEVEN
THINGS ARE
GETTING HOT—
FRED
HUMBLEBUM HIS
WAGE-SLIPS HATH
FORGOT

A POX ON
YOU—O
FACELESS
ONE!

YOU KNOW
YOU NEED YOUR
WAGESLIPS
HUMBLEBUM! SO
BACK AGAIN
TOMORROW YOU
MUST COME.

PISS
OFF

MINISTRY OF PLENTY

YOU WILL REQUIRE YOUR
IDENTITY CARD, BREATHING
LICENSE, HOROSCOPE, LAST 10
WAGE SLIPS AND HORMONE
COUNT. —BIG BROTHER.

TAKE THAT
YOU LITTLE
HORROR!

DO NOT ADJUST
YOUR SEAT—THERE
IS A FAULT IN
REALITY!

CHRIST, I'M
NUMBER 86!

COME
IN NO.
12!

APPOINTME
ONLY →

THIS WAY
DOWN

THE WAY
UP

HERE IS
YOUR NUMBA
VICER!

BY 10 O'CLOCK
THE DOORS ARE
OPENED WIDE.
A HORDE
OF HUNGRY
CLAIMANTS
POURS INSIDE

COME BACK
AGAIN TOMORROW
—WHAT THEY
ALWAYS SAY—
TO THE CREEPING
QUEUES WHO WANT
THEIR OATS TODAY.

MAG
THER